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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1817

INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2262

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 2566

RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000662

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA

ALSO FOR A/S SILVERBERG AND PDAS WARLICK

NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER/GAVITO

USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/KUMAR/PHEE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/07/2018

TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR PTER MCAP MARR EAIR IR LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: SAMIR GEAGEA LOOKING TOWARDS NEXT STEPS
FOR MARCH 14

Classified By: CDA Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In a late night, Sunday, May 11 meeting, Lebanese Forces (LF) leader Samir Geagea told Charge that the USG must not waiver in its support for March 14, that Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander Sleiman was weak, and that the LAF had failed to protect the people. Geagea suggested that the Arab League delegation heading to Beirut on Wednesday, May 15, demand that the roads leading to the airport be opened before they arrive and to involve Turkey in pressuring the Syrians.

¶2. (C) Charge, accompanied by Defense Attach, met with Samir Geagea at his party headquarters in Maarab. Geagea was calm and collected throughout the meeting.

KEEP UP WHAT YOU ARE DOING;
THESE ARE THE RULES OF THE GAME

¶3. (C) An energized Geagea told Charge that she must continue doing what she was doing, meeting with each of the key political leaders and GOL officials in rapid succession. Specifically, Geagea implored Charge to keep Siniora from considering resignation. Geagea said these back-to-back meetings were important to help maintain the morale of March 14 in these difficult times. An upbeat Geagea immediately got down to business, exuding an air of confidence and determination. "We (March 14 leaders) have some breathing room now, maybe one or two days to employ some short-term tactics. We need to get back onto the strategic level as soon as we can," said Geagea.

¶4. (C) When asked about the morale of Saad Hariri and Walid Jumblatt, Geagea told Charge that she had to keep talking to them no matter what happens. Geagea assessed that Saad is doing okay, but that Walid is not doing so well. Charge surmised this was because of the ongoing fighting in his area in the Chouf and the kidnapping of his men. Geagea deadpanned, "this is nothing new for Walid. These are the rules of the game in Lebanon."

WE CANNOT GIVE THE OPPOSITION ANYTHING
OR WE SANCTION THEIR ACTIVITIES

15. (C) Geagea told Charge that March 14, and the international community, must stand firm against this armed aggression by Hizballah. Geagea said March 14 leaders cannot give in to any political concessions as a matter of principle stating, "we hold this political and moral high ground now." Geagea assessed that the only way March 14 can defeat this "military attack" by the opposition is to hold firm on the political front, lest they legitimize Hizballah's actions as an acceptable way to achieve their political aims.

16. (C) Geagea reinforced, several times, that March 14 cannot enter into dialogue under duress and with the opposition pointing weapons at them. "We will tell Qatar 'no' to any dialogue while we are under siege, under fire, and the roads are blocked."

ARAB LEAGUE DELEGATIONS SHOULD CALL
FOR OPENING OF ROADS, LAYING DOWN ARMS

17. (C) Geagea suggested that the Arab League delegation that is on its way to Beirut to mediate should call for two preconditions. First, the airport and all of the roads must be opened. Siniora will be strengthened by this call by the Arab League. Second, all forces must retreat from Beirut back to where they came from. Additionally, the Army should issue and enforce a statement that says it will protect everyone. Geagea said all of this should be done before any dialogue begins.

WE MUST BLUNT HIZBALLAH'S ATTACK NOW

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MUST DO SOMETHING AGAINST IRAN AND SYRIA

18. (C) Geagea said, "I don't know how, but we need to halt the attack of Hizballah. Maybe a threat to Syria or Iran, but we cannot have anything inside Lebanon. This would hurt us." In any case, Geagea believes that something must be done in the next 12-24 hours against Syria and Iran or else Hizballah will continue its attacks. Geagea wondered if the Turks could help, explaining, "Syria values its relationship with Turkey. If Turkey told them to back off their support a little, it might help." In any case, Geagea sees all of these measures as short term tactical moves to provide some maneuver space for March 14.

19. (C) In the end, Geagea sees a need to fundamentally change the nature of the security regime in Lebanon. This is the strategic level planning that he sees as very necessary to preserve Lebanon. Citing the Army's failure to protect the population, Geagea requested weapons for his 5,000 LF fighters. He told us that he could raise another 5,000 in relatively short order. "This is a big process, with many logistical considerations. You must send someone to make an assessment with me to move this plan forward." DATT underscored that DOD works with the armed forces of states.

COMMENT

110. (C) Geagea was the cool general under fire. He did not appear to be dejected or deterred by the recent turn of events. In fact, Geagea has gotten a bit of bounce out of recent events as he is the only March 14 leader left who is not under siege by Hizballah. Although this is the second time he has asked us for weapons, we have not left him with any illusion that any type of military assistance is forthcoming for his LF militia. End comment.

SISON